

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 8670

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR PGOV IS US
SUBJECT: THE IMPACT ON ISRAEL OF VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE'S VISIT

1. SUMMARY: THE VICE PRESIDENT'S VISIT OCCURRED AT A LOW POINT IN US-ISRAELI RELATIONS. MANY SUSPECTED HIS PURPOSE IN COMING WAS TO EXPLOIT HIS LONG-TIME FRIENDSHIP FOR ISRAEL IN ORDER TO PRESSURE THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT. CONTROVERSY CONCERNING HIS PLANNED VISIT TO THE WESTERN WALL AND ISRAELI ANGER OVER A STATE DEPARTMENT STATEMENT ABOUT THE PLO ADDED FURTHER TO THE STRAINED ATMOSPHERE ON THE EVE OF HIS ARRIVAL. THESE IRRITANTS WERE, HOWEVER, OVERCOME BY THE TIME THE VICE PRESIDENT ARRIVED AND THE VISIT DID ACHIEVE SEVERAL SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES. HIS REITERATION OF THE U.S. COMMITMENT TO THEIR SECURITY AND WELL-BEING REASSURED ISRAELIS AN IMPORTANT
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ACCOMPLISHMENT WAS THE THE IMPETUS HE GAVE TO THE LONDON CONFERENCE. HIS VISIT ALSO SERVED TO GIVE BEGIN A NEEDED PSYCHOLOGICAL BOOST. HOWEVER, THE VICE PRESIDENT'S MAJOR ADDRESS, DELIVERED AT THE KNESSET, EVOKED MIXED FEELINGS AMONG THE ISRAELIS. THEY WELCOMED THE REASSURANCES AND THE POINTS SUPPORTING ISRAELI POLICIES, BUT THEY WERE DISTRUBED BY THE BASIC US-ISRAELI DIFFERENCES REFLECTED IN THE ADDRESS. THE SPEECH DID NOT ALLAY

ISRAELI CONCERNS THAT THE US-ISRAELI RELATIONSHIP IS IN SERIOUS TROUBLE. AS AN EVENT, THE VICE PRESIDENT'S VISIT FACED STIFF AND IMMEDIATE COMPETITION IN THE MIND OF THE PUBLIC FROM SUCH DEVELOPMENTS AS THE PRESIDENT'S GENEVA STATEMENT AND THE SHELLING OF EAST BEIRUT. HOWEVER, TWO IMPRESSIONS OF THE VISIT WILL PROBABLY REMAIN IN ISRAELI MEMORIES: VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE'S STRONG FRIENDSHIP FOR THEIR NATION AND HIS FORCEFUL PRESENTATION OF THE US CONVICTION THAT WITHDRAWAL ON ALL FRONTS IS THE UNAVOIDABLE PRICE FOR PEACE. END SUMMARY.

2. THE MOOD IN ISRAEL AWAITING THE VICE PRESIDENT ON HIS ARRIVAL WAS APPREHENSIVE, SUSPICIOUS AND DEFENSIVE. ALTHOUGH TAGGED AS A TRIBUTE TO ISRAEL ON ITS 30TH ANNIVERSARY, THE LOCAL PRESS VIEWED THE VISIT AS A POLITICAL MISSION -- A BELIEF REINFORCED BY THE ADDITION OF ALEXANDRIA TO THE ITINERARY. SOME TWO WEEKS EARLIER THE AMERICAN-ISRAELI RELATIONSHIP HAD HIT ANOTHER LOW OVER THE ISRAELI RESPONSE TO THE TWO AMERICAN QUESTIONS, AND MANY ISRAELIS EXPECTED THE VICE-PRESIDENT TO EXPLOIT HIS LONG-TIME FRIENDSHIP FOR ISRAEL AS A COVER FOR CRITICIZING THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES.

3. THERE WAS ALSO CONCERN THAT THE ADMINISTRATION WAS "USING" THE AMERICAN JEWISH LEADERS ACCOMPANYING THE VICE PRESIDENT TO DEMONSTRATE AMERICAN JEWISH SUPPORT FOR U.S. MIDDLE EAST POLICIES AND AS PRESSURE ON THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT. SOME ISRAELIS CLAIMED THAT THE GOAL WAS TO SPLIT THE AMERICAN

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JEWISH COMMUNITY IN ITS SUPPORT OF ISRAEL.

4. EVEN BEFORE HIS ARRIVAL, THE CONTROVERSY WHICH DEVELOPED OVER THE VISIT TO THE WESTERN WALL THREATENED TO CAST A PALL OVER THE ENTIRE VISIT. THE ATMOSPHERE WAS FURTHER BEDEVILED WHEN THE LOCAL PRESS ON JUNE 28 PRINTED DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARROP'S STATEMENT THAT THE USG HAS NEVER REGARDED THE PLO AS A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION.

5. DESPITE THIS INAUSPICIOUS SETTING, THE VISIT ACHIEVED SOME SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES. THE VICE-PRESIDENT'S OBVIOUS PERSONAL SYMPATHY FOR ISRAEL AND HIS REITERATION OF THE U.S. COMMITMENT TO IT GAVE AT LEAST TEMPORARY REASSURANCE TO ISRAELIS, INCREASINGLY PARANOID ABOUT AMERICA'S FIDELITY AS A FRIEND AND AN ALLY. HIS STATEMENT CONDEMNING PLO TERRORISM ALSO CALMED THE DISMAY IN ISRAEL OVER THE HARROP REMARKS. THE VICE PRESIDENT'S SEVERAL PUBLIC APPEARANCES WERE ALL SUCCESSES. ISRAELIS WERE PARTICULARLY MOVED BY HIS CALL AT

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 8670

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THE HOSPITAL TO VISIT CASUALTIES FROM THE MOST RECENT BOMB
EXPLOSION IN JERUSAELM. AND, AS IT TURNED OUT, RESOLUTION OF
THE WESTERN WALL IMBROGLIO WAS ACCEPTABLE, IF NOT WHOLLY
SATISFYING, TO MOST ISRAELIS. THE VICE PRESIDENT IS ALSO CRE-
DITED WITH BRINGING THE GOOD NEWS OF U.S. APPROVAL FOR THE
SALE OF KFIRS TO TAIWAN.

6. THE MOST CONCRETE ACHIEVEMENT, HOWEVER, WAS THE PUSH
GIVEN THE LONDON CONFERENCE BY THE VICE PRESIDENT'S EFFORTS
IN JERUSALEM AND ALEXANDRIA. ALTHOUGH ISRAELIS HAVE FEW ILLU-
SIONS OVER WHAT THE LONDON MEETING WILL ACCOMPLISH, IT DOES
HOLD OUT THE PROMISE OF NEW MOMENTUM TO THE STALLED PEACE
PROCESS.

7. ANOTHER ACCOMPLISHMENT WAS PSYCHOLOGICAL, BUT NO LESS
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IMPORTANT. BY COMING HERE, VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE ADMINISTERED
TO BEGIN A WELCOME SHOT IN THE ARM WHICH RAISED HIS FLAGGING
SPIRITS. HOW HE IS VIEWED BY 1600 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE IS

TERRIBLY IMPORTANT TO BEGIN. THE VISIT DEMONSTRATED THAT FOR THE U.S. HE REMAINS PRIME MINISTER OF ISRAEL AND THE MAN WASHINGTON RECOGNIZES IT MUST DEAL WITH IN PURSUIT OF PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

8. THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE VISIT, THE VICE-PRESIDENT'S SPEECH AT THE KNESSET, WAS RECEIVED WITH A CERTAIN AMBIVALENCE. ISRAELIS APPRECIATED THE STRONG REITERATION OF THE AMERICAN COMMITMENT TO ISRAEL'S SECURITY AND WELL-BEING AND THEY WERE REASSURED BY THE VICE-PRESIDENT'S REJECTION OF A WEST BANK STATE; BUT THEY CONCENTRATED ON WHAT THEY SAW AS THE SPEECH'S NEGATIVE ASPECTS. A LIKUD MK PREDICTABLY TOLD US IT WAS A MISTAKE FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT NOT TO MENTION BEGIN'S AUTONOMY PLAN. ONE NRP STALWART COMMENTED THAT FOR BEGIN THE SPEECH'S FLOWING WORDS ABOUT HIM AND ISRAEL WERE VITIATED BY THIS OMIS-SION. EVEN LABOR PARTY POLITICIANS, WHILE NOTING THE SYM-PATHETIC TONE OF THE ADDRESS, WERE DISTURBED BY WHAT THEY SAW AS THE DEEP AND BASIC U.S. -ISRAELI DIFFERENCES IMPLIED IN THE VICE PRESIDENT'S WORDS. FORMER PM RABIN PUBLICLY CRITICIZED THE POLITICAL THRUST OF THE SPEECH AS NO LESS THAN THE BROOKINGS PLAN, WHICH WAS WITHDRAWAL TO THE 1967 BORDERS IN RETURN FOR TOTAL PEACE.

9. THE VISIT DID NOT ALLAY ISRAELI CONCERNS THAT THE U.S. - ISRAELI RELATIONSHIP IS IN SERIOUS TROUBLE. THIS PERCEPTION WAS STRENGTHENED BY PRESIDENT CARTER'S STATEMENT TO AMERICAN NEWSPAPER EDITORS REGARDING A RETURN TO GENEVA, WHICH WAS SEEN HERE AS FURTHER PRESSURE ON ISRAEL. MANY POINTED TO THE THRUST OF THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS AS UNDERCUTTING THE VICE PRESIDENT'S GOAL OF EASING THE STRAIN IN THE RELATIONSHIP. THE OVERALL
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IMPRESSION WAS THAT THE VICE PRESIDENT' ASSURANCES WERE NOT A MAJOR ELEMENT IN WASHINGTON'S MIDDLE EAST STRATEGY.

10. IN A SOCIETY THAT LIVES FROM ONE CRISIS TO ANOTHER, NO SUSTAINED IMPACT FROM THIS VISIT COULD BE EXPECTED. INDEED, THE PRESIDENT'S GENEVA REMARKS WERE ALREADY STEALING HEADLINES WHILE THE VP WAS STILL HERE. PUBLICATION OF CAIRO'S PEACE PLAN AND THE SHELLING OF EAST BEIRUT QUICKLY DISPLACED THE VISIT IN THE CONVERSATION AND THINKING OF ISRAELIS. YET, THE VICE PRESIDENT'S SPEECH, CARRIED LIVE ON TV AND RADIO AND HEARD BY A WIDE AUDIENCE, DID SERVE TO CLARIFY AT A HIGH LEVEL THE DIF-FERENCES BETWEEN THE U.S. AND GOI POSITIONS TOWARD THE WEST BANK. BY DISAVOWING U.S. SUPPORT FOR A SEPARATE PALESTINIAN STATE AND SUGGESTING THE POSSIBILITY OF ISRAELI FORCES REMAIN-ING IN THE WEST BANK AFTER WITHDRAWAL, THE VICE PRESIDENT HIGHLIGHTED WEST BANK WITHDRAWAL PER SE AS THE CONTENTIOUS POINT IN U.S. - ISRAELI RELATIONS.

11. IN SUM: ALTHOUGH THE REASSURING EFFECT OF THE VICE
PRESIDENT'S VISIT WILL BE EPHEMERAL, IT DID GIVE BEGIN A
PSYCHOLOGICAL LIFT, AND THE OPPORTUNITY IT OFFERED FOR A HIGH
LEVEL EXCHANGE WAS A VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION TO CLARIFYING THE
ISSUES BETWEEN OUR TWO CONTRIES. HOWEVER, AS AN EVENT, THE
VISIT FACED STIFF COMPETITION IN RESERVING A NICHE IN
ISRAELI CONSCIOUSNESS BY THE MULTIPLICITY OF PROBLEMS FACING
THIS SMALL COUNTRY. WHAT WILL PROBABLY REMAIN OF THE VISIT
IN ISRAELI MEMORIES IS A VERY POSITIVE IMPRESSION OF VICE
PRESIDENT MONDALE, THE FRIEND OF ISRAEL, WHO FORCEFULLY
EXPRESSED THE U.S. CONVICTION THAT WITHDRAWAL ON ALL FRONTS
IS THE UNAVOIDABLE PRICE FOR PEACE.
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